

The Civic Engineer

Laura Illig tackles the city budget, school bonds and politics BY SHANNON FINNELL

Lots of people have opinions on city budget shortfalls, school funding crises, parent education challenges and the problems facing at-risk youth. Laura Illig has been hard at work tackling all these problems.

As chair of the city of Eugene Budget Committee, chair of the Yes for 4J Schools campaign for the successful 2013 bond measure, the fundraising chair of the Democratic Party of Lane County and a board member of Parenting Now and Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Lane County, Illig is, to say the least, deeply involved in local civic and political life. And that's on top of running her business-consulting firm, Corinthian Consulting.

In a sense, Illig was raised in political action. "I grew up outside of Washington, D.C., in Silver Spring, Md.," she says, "and I think if you grow up in the D.C. area, you kind of can't help but be exposed to that to some degree." When she was 6 years old, Illig's family moved into an integrated neighborhood, and she says that the experience, still controversial in the '70s, exposed her to politics for the first time.

After college, Illig lived in Japan for two years, then moved to Nashville while her husband attended law school. "While I was there I really felt like maybe the way to change the world is through business," she recalls, thinking that understanding how money flows and being part of allocating it could be a significant way to affect change.

Illig says she had a great professional experience working at a Fortune 500 company, but it was less ideal ethically. "There were times when it didn't seem necessarily like the customer's best interest was really at the heart of things," she says. Her next move was to Eugene, where she



PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

started working with credit unions, a setup she found to be more in line with her values.

Still desiring deeper involvement in the community, Illig participated in the Emerge Oregon program, the premier training for Democratic women interested in political leadership and running for office. "It's how you remove the mystery from the process," Illig says. "There are not enough women in elected office, up and down the ticket."

Next up, Illig says she's going to take a step back and decide if she's going to run for office, and if so, for what

position. She says she's not a single-issue person, but education in Oregon is a huge concern for her. "I believe one of the biggest challenges as a state that we have is the ballot measures that decimated education in the '90s," she says. "Twenty years later, I think we can now see just how damaging those things have been."

In her down time, Illig is a sensei in the art of Japanese flower arrangement, which she studied while living in Japan. "It is meditative and artistic, and there are a lot of philosophical principles involved," she says. "It's a nice way to use the other side of my brain." ■

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